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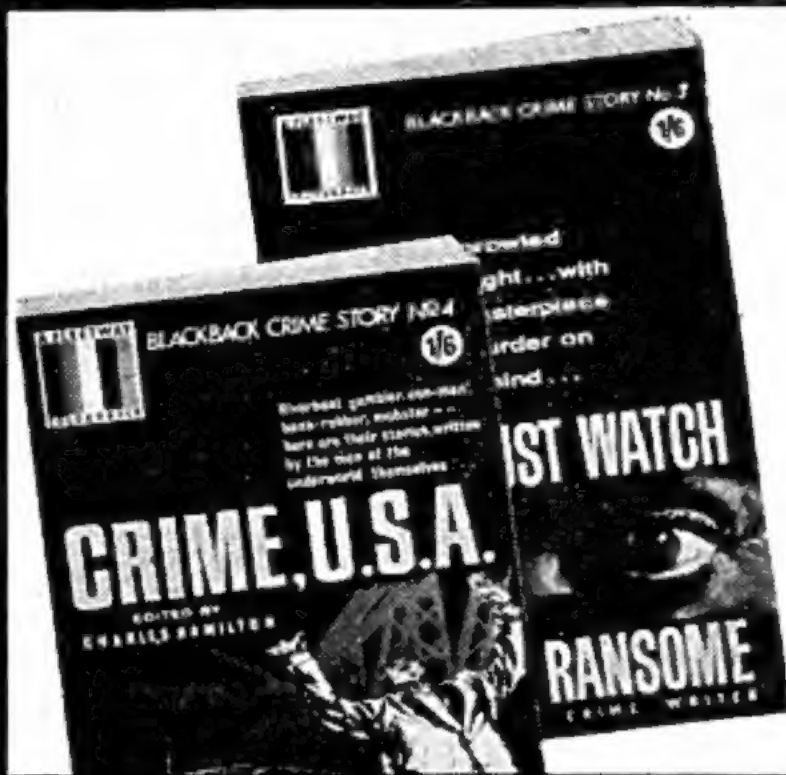
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FIRE-FIGHT



TRADITION IS CHERISHED IN THE
BRITISH ARMY. VICTORIES — AND
EVEN HEROIC DEFEATS — HAVE
BEEN COMMEMORATED IN A
DOZEN DIFFERENT WAYS, SOME
OF THEM PROUD AND TIMELESS,
SOME STRANGE AND ANTIQUATED.

Chapter 1. *Redcoat Hero*

AT MINDEN, ON 1ST AUGUST 1759, AS THE BRITISH REGIMENT'S MARCHED STEADFASTLY AGAINST THE FRENCH CAVALRY, THEY SNATCHED UP ROSES FROM THE WILD BRIARS AND BEDECKED THEIR UNIFORMS TO THE AMUSEMENT OF THE ENEMY.

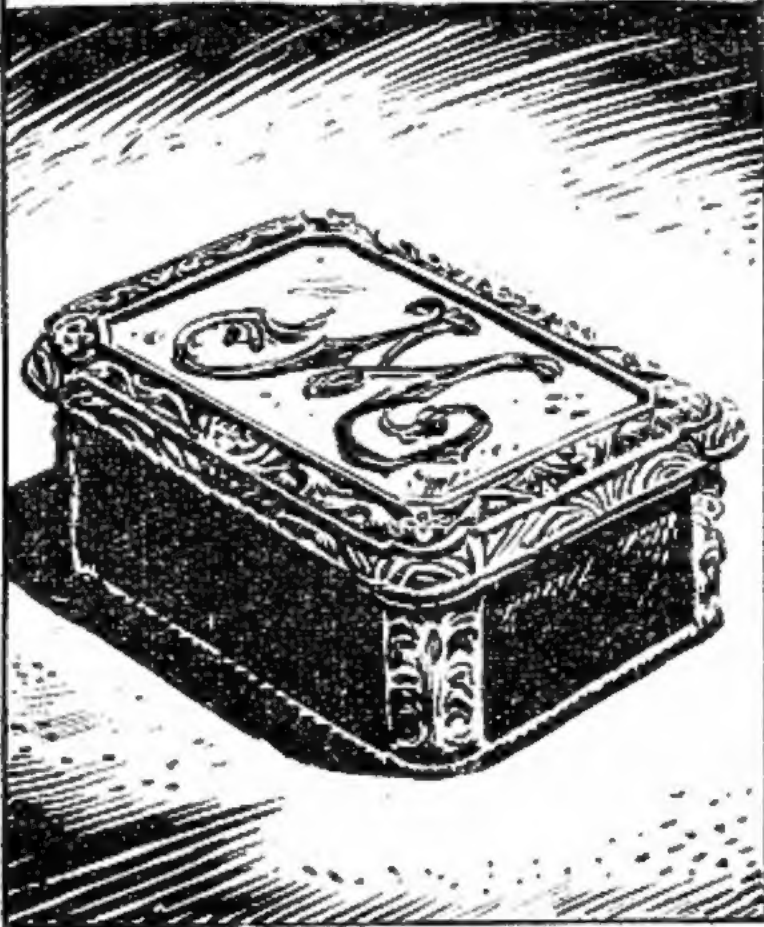


BUT THOSE ROSE-DECORATED INFANTRYMEN BLASTED THE SCOFFING FRENCH CAVALRY OFF THE FIELD OF MINDEN WITH THEIR DELIBERATE, ACCURATE MUSKET-FIRE...

ON MINDEN DAY EVER SINCE, AN OFFICER OF THE LANCASHIRE FUSILIERS, THE OLD 20TH FOOT, WHO HAS NOT ALREADY DONE SO, MUST STAND AND EAT A ROSE!



WITH THE LENSTER RANGERS, IT WAS MULVANY'S SNUFF-BOX!



THE BATTERED SILVER SNUFF-BOX OF COLONEL BARTHOLOMEW MULVANY. THE DATE - 22ND DECEMBER, 1813. THE PLACE - FORT ERIE, CANADA. THE WAR - AGAINST THE AMERICAN INVADERS OF BRITAIN'S NORTHERN EMPIRE...



FORT GEORGE, TWENTY MILES AWAY, WAS BESIEGED BY THE AMERICANS AND THEIR INDIAN ALLIES. THE RANGERS WERE MARCHING THERE - EACH COMPANY SEPARATELY, BY A DIFFERENT ROUTE. MULVANY HAD INSISTED ON HIS DINNER BEFORE LEAVING...



Fire-Fight

SOON, ONLY MULVANY AND HIS ADJUTANT, CAPTAIN JULES FRENCH, WERE LEFT AT THE TABLE. THE COLONEL ROSE AND BUCKLED ON HIS SWORD BELT...



THE PINE WOODS WERE WHITE WITH THE WINTER SNOWS, THE TREES STANDING LIKE GAUNT SENTINELS BEHIND THEM, OTHER SENTINELS SKULKED—THE INDIAN ALLIES OF THE AMERICANS.



THE AMERICANS, ATTACKING ACROSS LAKE ERIE, HAD RINGED THE STOCKADED FORT GEORGE. A GUN FROM THEIR SHIP HAD BEEN DRAGGED ACROSS THE SNOW TO POUND THE LOGGED DEFENCES.



THE NEWS OF THE RELIEVING FORCE PRECEDED IT. THE AMERICANS AND INDIANS WERE WAITING AS MULVANY, TAKING THE SHORTEST ROUTE, CAME WITHIN STRIKING DISTANCE.



Fire-Fight

THE TWO FORCES BATTLED IT OUT, STOLID BUT ACCURATE BRITISH MUSKET FIRE TAKING TOLL OF THE ENEMY. SOON THEY WERE AT CLOSE QUARTERS, BAYONET AGAINST BAYONET AND TOMAHAWK...



THE ENEMY HAD BEEN THE FIRST TO GIVE. AS MULVANY AND HIS TROOPS FOLLOWED UP, THE GUNNERS LOADED GRAPE, THAT DEVASTATING CHARGE OF SMALL SHOT, AND TURNED THE MUZZLES ON THE ADVANCING BRITISH...



AT POINT-BLANK RANGE, THE GUN
BLASTED GRAPE-SHOT IN A
SPREADING ARC OF DESTRUCTION,
SCYTHING THE BRITISH DOWN...

LOAD HER
UP AGAIN, MEN!
WE'LL SHOW THEM
REDCOATS!



THE FRONT RANK WAS DECIMATED.
ARTILLERY, EVEN MUZZLE-LOADERS,
COULD DOMINATE A BATTLEFIELD
IN A WAR LIKE THIS. MULVANY,
WITH A PIECE OF GRAPE IN HIS
SHOULDER, TRIED TO RALLY THEM...

RANGERS!
CHARGE THAT
GUN!

SIR!
YOU ARE
WOUNDED!



THE COLONEL ROARED LIKE A WOUNDED BULL AND BEGAN TO RUN TOWARDS THE GUN...



GIVE ME COVER! I'LL SPIKE THE BENIGHTED THING MYSELF, EGAD!

FIRE, MEN! OPEN FIRE!

MULVANY CHARGED UP TO THE GUN AND SLASHED AT THE GUNNER AS HE WAS ABOUT TO APPLY THE GLOWING FUSE TO THE TOUCH-HOLE...



CURSED YANKEES! DOWN WITH YOU, FELLOW!

HE LAID ABOUT HIM WITH HIS SWORD EVEN AS THE BALLS FROM THE MUSKETS SLUGGED INTO HIM.

HE'S A
MADMAN! KILL
HIM! KILL THE
REDCOAT!

FOLLOW
THE COLONEL!
FOLLOW COLONEL
MULVANY!



WITH THE GUN OVERPOWERED IT BECAME AN INFANTRY BATTLE AGAIN. THE OTHER COMPANIES HAD ARRIVED ON THE FLANKS AND THE BESIEGED DEFENDERS OF FORT GEORGE BROKE OUT TO JOIN IN THE FIGHT.



FORT GEORGE HAD BEEN RELIEVED BY THE LENSTER RANGERS - BUT AT A COST ONLY THEY COULD KNOW. FOR THEIR BELOVED COLONEL LAY DYING NEAR THE GUN HE HAD, SINGLE-HANDED, PUT OUT OF ACTION.



COLONEL! THE FORT HAS BEEN RELIEVED! WE WILL TAKE YOU IN AND THE SURGEON WILL -

NO - IT IS TOO LATE, ME BOY! I AM DONE FOR! GET THE SNUFF-BOX FROM MY POCKET -

THE ADJUTANT DREW OUT MULVANY'S OLD SNUFF-BOX, THOUGH THE MISTINESS IN HIS EYES MADE HIM FUMBLE AS HE DID SO.



TAKE IT. CARRY IT FOR THE REGIMENT IN PEACE AND WAR. TELL THEM NOT TO FORGET ME!

AND SO DIED A MAN BRAVE ENOUGH TO HAVE WON THE VICTORIA CROSS. BUT THE CROSS WAS STILL FORTY-THREE YEARS IN THE FUTURE. YET HE WAS NOT FORGOTTEN - FOR MULVANY'S NAME BECAME A TRADITION IN THE RANGERS.



I WILL CARRY IT FOR THE REGIMENT, COLONEL! AND OTHERS WILL CARRY IT AFTER ME!

Chapter 2. Battle Shock

FROM THAT DAY THE ADJUTANT OF THE LENSTER RANGERS SAFEGUARDED MULVANY'S SNUFF-BOX, PLACING IT AT THE COLONEL'S PLACE ON THE 22ND. DECEMBER EACH YEAR, ON "FORT GEORGE DAY".



THIS WAS "FORT GEORGE DAY". 1943. AFTER DUNKIRK, THE RANGERS HAD REMAINED IN A HUTTED CAMP IN NORTHERN ENGLAND, TRAINING FOR THE SECOND FRONT.

YES, IT MAKES YOU THINK, CASEY! NEVER MISSED A YEAR, EITHER. I HOPE IT'LL GO ALL RIGHT TONIGHT.

AND WHY SHOULDN'T IT, CAPTAIN? THE NEW COLONEL MAY NOT HAVE BEEN IN THE RANGERS BEFORE - BUT HE KNOWS THE FORM.

BUT DONOVAN REMEMBERED THE TALK HE HAD HAD WITH THE NEW COLONEL, ADRIAN NEAMES, THE PREVIOUS DAY.

OF COURSE I KNOW ABOUT 'FORT GEORGE DAY'. ANOTHER DIE-HARD TRADITION. WE HAD ONE IN MY OLD REGIMENT. DRUMMER BOY MARCHING ROUND ON THE MESS TABLE ONCE A YEAR. DARNED SILLY NONSENSE, I CALLED IT!

YES, SIR - BUT WE'VE KEPT IT UP IN THE RANGERS - EVER SINCE EIGHTEEN THIRTEEN.

THE NEXT WORDS HAD ROCKED DONOVAN BACK ON HIS HEELS.

THEN IT'S TIME WE GAVE IT A REST! WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE FIGHTING A WAR! THERE'LL BE NO TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY FOR THE TROOPS. IT'LL BE TRAINING AS USUAL!

BUT, SIR - THE MEN HAVE ALWAYS HAD A BREAK ON - OH, VERY GOOD, SIR! TRAINING AS USUAL!

BUT IF THE MEN HAD BEEN DONE OUT OF THEIR CELEBRATIONS ON THE EXCUSE OF TRAINING, DONOVAN WAS DOING HIS ADJUTANT'S DUTY ON THIS IMPORTANT DAY. HE TURNED TO THE MESS SERGEANT...

THEY'LL BE COMING IN SOON, CASEY. SEE THE DINNER GOES AS WELL AS EVER. I CAN RELY ON YOU -

YOU CAN THAT, SIR! THE COOK'S DONE HIMSELF PROUD, HE HAS!



INTO THE NISSEN HUT, SERVING AS A MESS, CAME THE OFFICERS OF THE 1ST. BATTALION, LENSTER RANGERS, LED BY THE ARROGANT NEAMES.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MEN, LOWTHER? THEY WERE TRAINING LIKE A LOT OF OLD WOMEN TODAY!

I THINK THEY WERE A LITTLE SORE, COLONEL. THEY'D EXPECTED THE USUAL DAY OFF, YOU SEE -



NEAME'S FACE DARKENED AS HIS EYE
FELL ON THE BATTERED SNUFF-BOX.



THE COLONEL BARKED FOR THE MESS SERGEANT.



THEN-TO THE UTTER HORROR OF ALL PRESENT-THE BOX WENT FLYING TO THE END OF THE HUT.

SEE WHAT I MEAN! NO DISCIPLINE! THE BATTALION'S BEFUZZLED WITH THIS NONSENSE. STAY WHERE YOU ARE, DONOVAN! SERVE THE DINNER, SERGEANT!



IT WAS A SILENT MEAL, NEAMES GETTING THE BRIEFEST OF MONOSYLLABLES IN ANSWER TO HIS ATTEMPTS AT CONVERSATION, NOT A MAN WAS SORRY WHEN IT WAS OVER.



I NEVER THOUGHT I'D LIVE TO SEE THE DAY! WAIT 'TIL THEY HEAR ABOUT THIS IN THE SERGEANTS' MESS!

BETTER KEEP IT QUIET, CASEY. AFTER ALL-HE'S NOT A RANGER! HE'S NOT ONE OF US!

DONOVAN HAD BROUGHT THE SNUFF-BOX OUT OF DUNKIRK SAFELY-AND HE WOULD STILL SAFEGUARD IT.



IT'LL BE WANTED AGAIN- WHEN WE GET A RANGER IN COMMAND ONCE MORE.

Fire-Fight

MONTHS LATER, THE RANGERS WENT TO WAR AGAIN. THEIR BATTLEFIELD WAS TO BE THE NORMANDY BEACHES ON D-DAY. IN HIS PACK, WITH HIS PERSONAL THINGS, CHARLES DONOVAN CARRIED THE REGIMENT'S TREASURE.



DESPITE THE COLONEL'S UNPOPULARITY, DONOVAN ADMITTED TO HIMSELF THAT HE DID NOT APPEAR TO BE LACKING IN BRAVERY AND TOUGHNESS...



RAMPS DOWN / ACROSS BEACHES ALREADY STAINED RED, THE RANGERS LAUNCHED THEMSELVES INTO OCCUPIED EUROPE.



YOU KNOW THE DRILL! HEADS DOWN - KEEP MOVING!

A MORTAR BOMB BURST YARDS FROM HIM, KICKING UP THE SAND INTO HIS FACE.



OF COURSE I'M ALL RIGHT - WHEN I GET THIS CURSED SAND OUT OF MY EYES! WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

COLONEL! YOU ALL RIGHT?

THEY STORMED INLAND, THE COLONEL STILL AT THEIR HEAD, MEETING INCREASING RESISTANCE FROM DUG-IN DEFENCES.



FEUER!

THE MEN TO THE RIGHT AND LEFT OF NEAMES WERE CUT DOWN BEFORE HIS EYES. IT WAS NOT A MIRACLE HE WAS MISSED, JUST THE TECHNICAL FAULT OF TWO MISSING BULLETS IN THE SPANDAU AMMO BELT. BUT THE SHOCK STOPPED HIM DEAD.



NEAMES TRIED TO STILL THE POUNDING IN HIS THROAT AS HE HUGGED THE FRENCH SOIL. THE BULLETS WHINED OVER HIS HEAD LIKE ANGRY BEES.



EGOTISM SURGED OVER THE COLONEL AGAIN. FOR YEARS HE HAD LOOKED FORWARD TO ACTION, KNOWING HE WOULD BE EQUAL TO IT.



THE MACHINE GUN HAD SWEEPED TO THE FAR WING OF ITS ARC. THERE WAS NOTHING THREATENING HIM. HE WOULD PROVE TO THESE RANGERS THAT THEY HAD A COLONEL TO BE PROUD OF!



UP NOW!
FOLLOW ME!
WE'LL GRUB OUT
THIS SCUM!
FOLLOW ME,
I SAY!

IT WAS MADNESS. THE PILL BOX HAD TO BE SILENCED BY OTHER MEANS. DONOVAN STARED AT HIS C.O. IN AMAZEMENT.



THIS IS CRAZY!
IT'S NOT JUST COURAGE—
IT'S SHEER LUNACY!
GET DOWN, SIR!

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THE BULLETS SMASHED INTO THE COLONEL'S GUN, TEARING IT FROM HIS HANDS. THEY SPATTERED THE GROUND AT HIS FEET, BURNED A VICIOUS WEAL ACROSS HIS RIBS.

STOP /
YOU'LL KILL
ME! UGH!



THE MEN WERE UNABLE TO REACH THE COLONEL UNTIL THE MORTAR COMPANY HAD SILENCED THE PILL BOX. DONOVAN WAS SHOCKED TO FIND NOT ONLY A MAN WHO HAD SURVIVED ALMOST CERTAIN DEATH, BUT A MAN WHO SHOWED HE HAD BEEN THROUGH FIRE.

COLONEL
NEAMES!

THEY COULDN'T
KILL ME! NOT ME!
THEY COULDN'T
KILL ME!



THEY GOT NEAMES INTO A JEEP. THOUGH HE WAS QUIET NOW, DONOVAN HAD NOT LIKED WHAT HE HAD SEEN.

BACK TO THE BEACH, IS IT, SIR?

YES. THERE'S A BASE HOSPITAL ESTABLISHED THERE. THEY'LL KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH HIM.



THE C.O. SAT QUIET, ALMOST MOROSE, AS CASEY TRIED TO THREAD HIS WAY BACK PAST THE HEAVY TRAFFIC THAT WAS POUNDING OFF THE BEACHES.

WOW! LOOK AT THIS LOT, SIR!

PULL INTO THAT SIDE ROAD TO THE RIGHT. WE MIGHT GET ROUND THAT WAY.



THEY SWUNG RIGHT, PAST A STATIONARY TANK—
AND AS THEY WENT BY IT, THE TANK MOVED,
EXPOSING TOO LATE, THE NOTICE IT HAD OBSERVED.



TROUBLE WAS WAITING LESS THAN A MILE UP THE ROAD. A RIFLE-
DISCHARGED GRENADE SMASHED INTO THE ROAD AHEAD OF THEM.



AS THEY JABBED BURSTS OF FIRE AT THE ADVANCING GERMANS, NEAMES WAS VIOLENTLY MANOEUVRING THE JEEP INTO THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION.



AS SOON AS HE'S GOT THE JEEP ROUND, GET INTO IT WHILE I COVER YOU, CASEY!

DONOVAN EMPTIED HIS MAGAZINE, YELLED TO CASEY TO MOVE INTO THE JEEP.

I'M EMPTY! GET IN NOW, CASEY!

GOOD GRIEF! I CAN'T! HE'S TAKEN A POWDER ON US!



THE TWO MEN COULD HARDLY BELIEVE THEIR EYES!

HE'S REALLY CRACKED UP! HE'S SCARED RIGHT DOWN TO THE CORE!



THEY WERE LEFT WIDE OPEN! CASEY'S FIRST THOUGHT WAS FOR THEIR LIVES — BUT DONOVAN HAD ANOTHER RESPONSIBILITY.

COR! WHAT DO WE DO NOW, SIR? FIGHT OR — GIVE OURSELVES UP?

THE SNUFF-BOX! I CAN'T LOSE THE SNUFF-BOX!

DESPERATELY, CAPTAIN DONOVAN STARTED TO DIG INTO THE BANK OF THE DITCH WITH HIS BARE HANDS.

HOLD 'EM OFF FOR A FEW MINUTES IF YOU CAN. I'VE GOT TO HIDE THE BOX.

THEY'RE COMING! CAN'T HOLD 'EM FOR LONG, SIR!

THE OFFICER HASTILY PLACED THE SILVER BOX IN THE HOLE AND COVERED IT WITH A ROCK.

IT'S THE BEST I CAN DO! CASEY, FOR PETE'S SAKE REMEMBER THIS ROCK! SQUARE, WITH A RIDGE IN THE MIDDLE OF IT! MULVANY'S SNUFF-BOX IS UNDER IT!

THEY CONTINUED TO FIGHT AS LONG AS THEIR AMMO LASTED — UNTIL THERE WAS NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO SURRENDER.

ENGLANDER
SWINE! TAKE THEM
TO THE REAR —
SCHNELL!

JAWOHL,
HERR
LEUTNANT.

DONOVAN'S EYES WERE SEARCHING THE COUNTRYSIDE. ONE DAY HE WOULD HAVE TO COME BACK HERE AND FIND A SMALL HOLE IN THE GROUND.

WE'VE HAD IT NOW,
SIR! ALL BECAUSE OF
THAT ROTTEN C.O.
OF OURS!

SHUT UP!
I'M TRYING TO
CONCENTRATE!

NEXT MOMENT, HIS CONCENTRATION WAS VIOLENTLY BROKEN AS A SHELL BURST AT THE SIDE OF THE ROAD!

AAGH!

DIVE
FOR COVER,
CASEY!

THE ALLIES WERE FORCING
INLAND FAST. THE SHELL
HAD COME FROM A
CHURCHILL TANK OF THE
ARMOURED SPEARHEAD.

TWO OF OUR
LADS, EH? GOOD
SHOW!

THANKS,
OLD MAN - GLAD
YOU HAPPENED
ALONG!

NOW THERE WOULD BE NO NEED TO
REMEMBER A SMALL HOLE IN THE
GROUND IN THE MIDDLE OF NORMANDY.

CAN I GIVE
YOU A LIFT? HERE,
I SAY! WHERE ARE
YOU OFF TO?

WON'T BE A
TICK! I'VE GOT
A RENDEZVOUS
WITH MULVANY!

Fire-Fight

BACK WITH THE RANGERS, DONOVAN ALSO HAD A RENDEZVOUS WITH COLONEL NEAMES. HE FOUND THAT MAJOR FLOYD, THE SECOND-IN-COMMAND, HAD TAKEN OVER.



YOU CAN'T SEE HIM — HE'S RESTING. YES — I KNOW ALL ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED THIS MORNING!

BUT THE MAN'S NERVE HAS GONE! HE WAS DOING FINE UNTIL HE MISSED DEATH BY INCHES!

TO AN OUTSIDER, FLOYD'S NEXT WORDS WOULD NOT HAVE MADE SENSE. BUT THE HARD-BITTEN REGULAR HAD SERVED WITH THE RANGERS SINCE LEAVING SANDHURST YEARS BEFORE THE WAR. THE REGIMENT WAS HIS MOTHER AND FATHER.



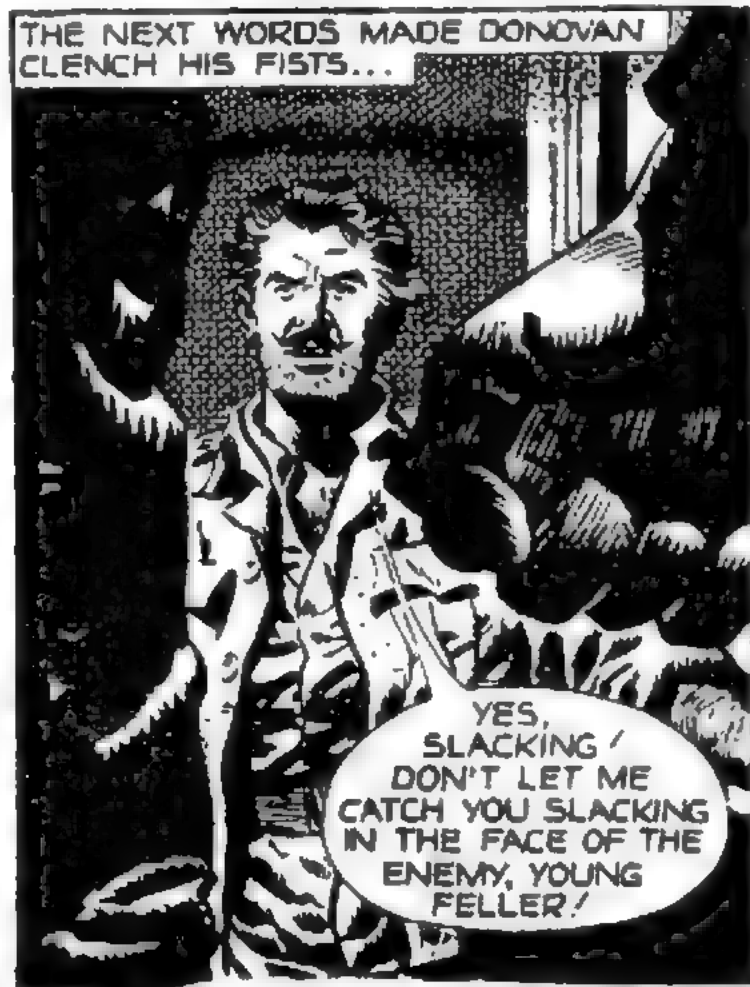
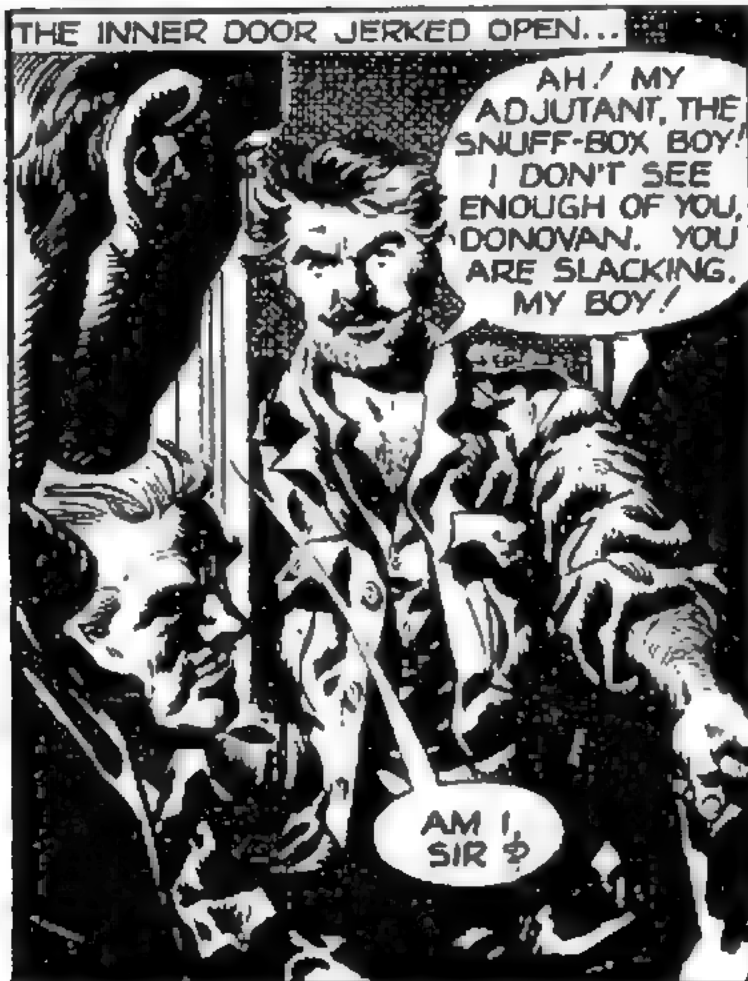
LOOK — I'M NOT LETTING A C.O. OF THE RANGERS BE SHIPPED BACK BECAUSE HIS NERVE HAS GONE.

SOME OF THIS DONOVAN UNDERSTOOD, BUT THERE WAS STILL ONE PROBLEM TO SOLVE.



BUT WHO'S TO COMMAND? HE CAN'T, THAT'S FOR SURE!

HE'LL REMAIN IN COMMAND — NOMINALLY. I'LL DO THE NECESSARY WORK. DONOVAN, WE'LL HAVE TO COVER UP FOR HIM.



THE COLONEL TURNED BACK INTO HIS ROOM AND SLAMMED THE DOOR.

THAT'S THE LIMIT!
IF YOU WANT MY OPINION-
I THINK THE BRIGADIER
SHOULD BE TOLD
THE TRUE
FACTS!

I'LL DECIDE
THAT! YOU GET
ON WITH YOUR JOB
AND FORGET IT!

THE ANGER BOILED IN DONOVAN AS HE LEFT THE BUILDING...

WHAT'S
HAPPENING
TO THE RANGERS?
A C.O. WHO WON'T
FIGHT AND THE SECOND-
IN-COMMAND TRYING
TO CARRY TWO
JOBS!

AS THE REGIMENT TOOK UP THE TASK OF PATROLLING THE CANAL-RIDDLED FRONT, NEAMES SUDDENLY INSISTED ON GOING OUT WITH DONOVAN HIMSELF...

ABLE COMPANY'S
POSITION IS ON THE
MAAS CANAL, SIR. DO
YOU WISH TO INSPECT
THEM?

MIGHT
AS WELL.
IT'LL WAKE
THEM UP A
BIT.



A COMPANY DID NOT REQUIRE WAKING UP. THE GERMANS, ALREADY PREPARING FOR THE ARDENNES BREAK-THROUGH TO THE SOUTH, HAD SET THE WHOLE FRONT ALIGHT.



BY THE TIME THE CO'S JEEP REACHED THE VICINITY, A FULL-SCALE BATTLE WAS IN PROGRESS.



THE RISING DIN OF BATTLE HAD DROWNED THE COLONEL'S ORDER. HE RAISED HIMSELF FURIOUSLY FROM HIS SEAT...

I SAID STOP, YOU FOOL! WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO DO TO ME?



THEY FINISHED UP IN THE DITCH, THE WEAL ACROSS THE ADJUTANT'S FACE SMARTING NO MORE THAN THE FURY INSIDE HIM.

WHAT WAS THAT FOR~ SIR?

YOU WOULDN'T STOP! YOU WOULDN'T OBEY ME! I'M STILL THE C.O., REMEMBER! NOW GET THE JEEP BACK TO H.Q. MY PLACE IS THERE!



LATER THAT DAY, WHEN THE FIGHTING HAD DIED DOWN, DONOVAN SOUGHT OUT MAJOR FLOYD AND SPILLED OUT HIS DISGUST.

I TELL YOU HE RAN AWAY, MAKING ME GO WITH HIM! HE'S NOT FIT TO COMMAND!

SIMMER DOWN, DONOVAN! WE'VE BEEN PUTTING UP WITH THIS FOR MONTHS. I DON'T MEAN TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT—UNDERSTAND?



ON THE 16TH. DECEMBER, VON RUNSTEDT STRUCK HARD AND VIOLENTLY AT THE AMERICAN 1ST ARMY. HIS TIGER TANKS ROLLED FORWARD THROUGH THE WINTER SNOW, APPARENTLY UNSTOPPABLE.



AIDED BY THE WINTRY WEATHER, WHICH REDUCED AIR RETALIATION TO A MINIMUM, THE GERMAN FORCES PENETRATED DEEPLY INTO THE AMERICAN-HELD SECTOR.

THE VILLAGE OF SAINT COBENZ? GIVE ORDERS FOR THE SECOND BAVARIAN REGIMENT TO TAKE IT—BY SIEGE, IF NECESSARY!



JAWOHL, HERR GENERAL!

ENEMY ARMOUR BY-PASSED THE TOWN, LEAVING THEIR INFANTRY TO ATTACK IT. THE AMERICANS WERE SEALED OFF.

COLONEL—BUT THERE'S GOTTA BE AN AIRDROP MIGHTY SOON, OR WE'LL BE CHEWING OUR DARNED EQUIPMENT!

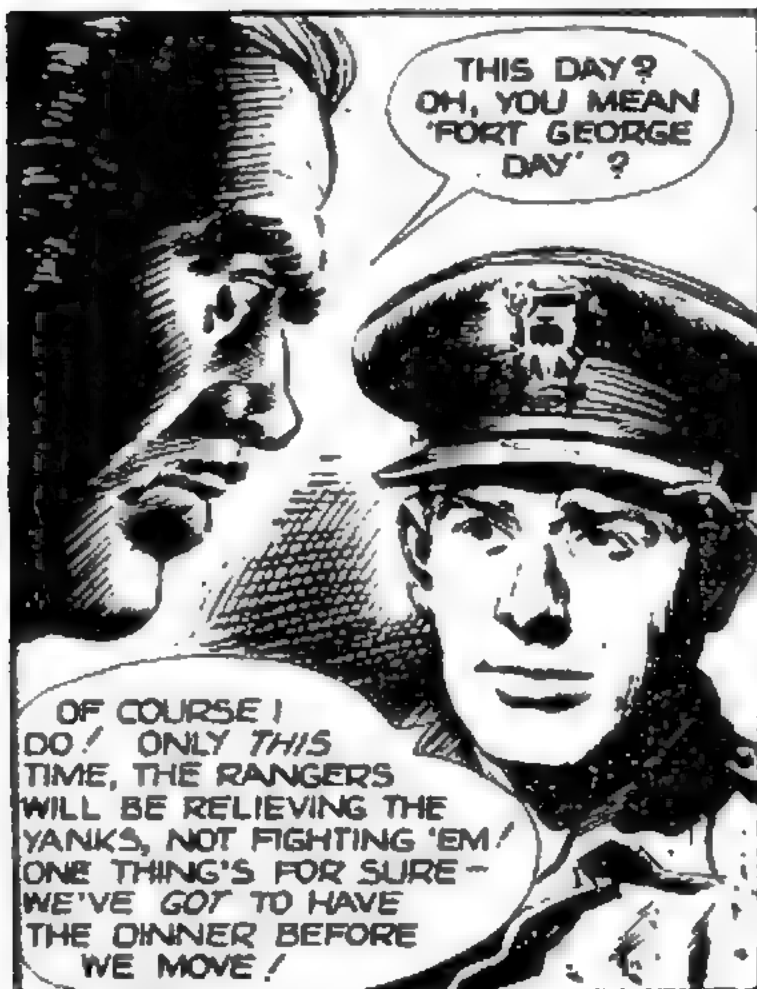


WE'LL DO JUST THAT IF WE HAVE TO! TELL THE MEN TO TIGHTEN THEIR BELTS—AND HIT EVERY KRAUT THAT SHOWS HIS HEAD!

BRITISH TROOPS WERE MOVED DOWN FROM THE NORTH TO MEET THE THREAT TO THE WHOLE FRONT. ON THE 22ND, "FORT GEORGE DAY", THE LENSTER RANGERS RECEIVED THEIR ORDERS.

SAINT COBENZ —
RIGHT HERE! WE
MOVE TONIGHT, WITH
SUPPLIES FOR THE
GARRISON, DONOVAN.
WE'RE TO BUST
OUR WAY IN!

YOU KNOW —
IT'S ALMOST AS
IF THEY CHOSE US
ESPECIALLY FOR
THIS DAY!



NEITHER HAD HEARD THE INNER
DOOR OPEN. THEY JUMPED AS THE
HARSH VOICE OF COLONEL NEAMES
BROKE IN.

WHAT MOVE?
I'M SUPPOSED TO
BE IN COMMAND
HERE — BUT I'M
ALWAYS THE
LAST TO HEAR
ABOUT
ANYTHING!

FLOYD TRIED, AS HE HAD DONE FOR MONTHS WITH INFINITE PATIENCE, TO KEEP UP THE PRETENCE THAT THIS MAN WHOSE NERVES HAD BEEN SHOT TO RIBBONS, WAS STILL THE LEADER.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE ASLEEP, SIR! WE HAVE TO STRIKE SOUTH TONIGHT - TO BREAK A STRANGLE-HOLD ON SAINT COBENZ. THE YANKS THERE ARE DESPERATE FOR SUPPLIES.

YANKS? LET THEM FIGHT THEIR OWN BATTLES! WE DO NOT MOVE!

AT THAT TENSE MOMENT, THE TELEPHONE BELL RANG.

IT'S THE BRIG. HE WANTS THE C.O. TO GO UP TO HIS H.Q. AT ONCE!

HE DOES, EH? RIGHT - I'LL TELL HIM WHAT I'VE JUST SAID.

NO, YOU WON'T! MAJOR, YOU GO - SAY THE COLONEL'S SICK OR SOMETHING. I'LL DEAL WITH THIS END!

THE FARCE HAD GONE ON TOO LONG. FLOYD, HIMSELF, WAS NEAR TO CRACKING POINT. HE SEEMED GLAD TO GET OUT AND LEAVE THE PROBLEM TO DONOVAN.

THIS IS MUTINY!

COLONEL, YOU'RE GOING TO STOP RIGHT HERE UNTIL THIS PICNIC IS OVER - AND THEN YOU CAN GO TO HOSPITAL!

ADRIAN NEAMES' REFLEXES WERE AS FAST AS EVER THEY WERE...

TAKE THAT, YOU WHIPPER-SNAPPER! OUT OF MY WAY!

ALTHOUGH DAZED, DONOVAN HAD SENSE ENOUGH TO KNOW WHAT TO DO - HE SNATCHED OUT HIS REVOLVER - AND FIRED!

COLONEL!
STOP RIGHT
THERE! OR, BY
HEAVENS, I'LL
DRILL YOU!



INSTANTLY, THE COLONEL COVERED BACK AS THE SOUND OF THE SHOT REVERBERATED ROUND THE ROOM.

NO! NOT
THAT! PLEASE-
NO SHOOTING! I
CAN'T STAND THE
SHOOTING!



DONOVAN TRIED TO CALM THE QUIVERING MAN.


LOOK - I'M SORRY I
HAD TO DO THAT! BUT
IT PROVES MY POINT.
YOU NEED HOSPITAL
TREATMENT. YOU'LL
GET IT, EVEN IF IT
DOES HARM THE
REPUTATION OF
THE REGIMENT.



Chapter 3. *The Fighting Man*


WHILE THE RANGERS WORKED HARD ALL DAY TO PREPARE FOR THE NIGHT'S MISSION, NEAMES HAD KEPT TO HIS ROOM.

I CALLED IN TO TELL YOU WE WILL BE MOVING OFF SOON, SIR. STAY HERE UNTIL WE GET BACK AND I WILL ARRANGE FOR YOUR ADMISSION TO HOSPITAL.



NEAMES SEEMED TO HAVE LOST ALL INTEREST UNTIL THE ADJUTANT SPOKE OF THE AGE-OLD CEREMONY.

WE ARE HOLDING A 'FORT GEORGE' DINNER IN THE MESS, BUT I'LL HAVE SOME FOOD SENT IN HERE FOR YOU, SIR.



NO! I WILL SIT AT THE HEAD OF THE TABLE—AS LONG AS I CAN. IT MAY BE THE LAST TIME.



THERE WAS NO OBJECTION FROM NEAMES THIS YEAR. INDEED, HE WENT THROUGH HIS PART OF THE CEREMONY AS EACH OFFICER CAME FORWARD AND TOOK A PINCH OF SNUFF.



SOON ALL HAD LEFT,
TO LEAD THEIR
COMPANIES AND
PLATOONS TO THE
RELIEF OF ST. COBENZ.
DONOVAN WAS
THE LAST

I'LL TAKE
THIS, SIR—

NO—NOT
THIS TIME! ...
THE FIRST FORT
GEORGE DAY IT WAS
THE COLONEL WHO
CARRIED THE
SNUFF-BOX!

CERTAINLY COLONEL MULVANY HAD
CARRIED THE BOX INTO ACTION. BUT
HE HAD BEEN A FIGHTING MAN!

BUT YOU'RE
NOT GOING WITH
US! IT IS MY
RESPONSIBILITY,
COLONEL!

DONOVAN,
I'VE HAD ALL DAY
TO THINK THIS ONE
OUT. I'VE GOT TO GIVE
MYSELF ONE-MORE
CHANCE! MAYBE THE
SNUFF-BOX WILL
HELP ME NOW—

DONOVAN REMEMBERED HOW NEAMES HAD FEARLESSLY STORMED THE BEACHES IN NORMANDY. THE C.O. HAD NOT SEEMED TO KNOW WHAT FEAR WAS UNTIL THE MORTAR BOMBS AND BULLETS PIERCED HIS INNER DEFENCES.



IT'S UP TO YOU, SIR! ALL THE REGIMENT WOULD BE DELIGHTED IF YOU - IF YOU MADE IT!

AND YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN, SIR!

SO MULVANY'S SNUFF-BOX WENT TO BATTLE AGAIN IN THE POCKET OF A COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE LENSTER RANGERS.



LAST COLUMN MOVED OUT TEN MINUTES AGO, SIR.

OKAY, CASEY, LET HER ROLL. YOU KNOW THE ROUTE FOR SAINT COBENZ...

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IT WAS MIDNIGHT WHEN THEY REACHED THEIR OBJECTIVE. SOME OF THE RANGERS HAD BEEN BATTLING FOR AN HOUR BEFORE THEY ARRIVED.

UP THE RANGERS!
WE'LL GET THROUGH THIS TIME!



AS IN MUCH OF THE ARDENNES, THE ROAD CUT THROUGH THE HILL, MAKING A WONDERFUL DEFENSIVE SITE FOR THE GERMANS, WHO HAD SITED THEIR MACHINE GUN POSTS WITH SKILL AND EFFICIENCY.

ACH!
THE FOOLS
ARE TRYING
AGAIN!
FEUER!



THE BRITISH MORTARS HAD BEEN BLANKETING THE GERMAN POSITIONS FOR FIFTEEN MINUTES, BUT IT SEEMED, IN VAIN. FOR WHEN THE RANGERS ATTACKED AGAIN, A VICIOUS FUSILLADE GREETED THEM.



LEUTENANT BAILEY GOT BACK TO THE H.Q. COMMAND POST AS CASEY DROVE THE JEEP IN.

IT'S NO GOOD, MAJOR! THE MORTARS COULDN'T HAVE TOUCHED THOSE KRAUTS! IT'LL NEED ARMOUR TO GET THROUGH THERE!

THEY'D HAVE SENT ARMOUR IF THEY COULD HAVE SPARED ANY. INSTEAD, THEY GAVE THE JOB TO US.

AND WE'RE GOING TO DO IT!



FLOYD STARED. THE UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL OF THE COLONEL WAS AS REMARKABLE AS THE NEW CONFIDENT NOTE IN HIS VOICE.



WHAT'S
THE POSITION
HERE ?

WE'RE HELD
UP BY MACHINE
GUN POSTS AT THE
BASE OF THE HILL,
SIR. THERE'S NO
WAY ROUND IT,
EITHER

NEAMES, DEFINITELY IN CHARGE AGAIN, TOOK SAILEY FORWARD TO RECCÉ THE SITUATION HIMSELF.



WHAT
HAPPENED?
WHAT DID YOU
DO TO HIM ?

NOT A THING!
IT'S HIS IDEA. HE
THINKS IF HE CAN SURVIVE
ONE MORE EXPERIENCE
UNDER FIRE, HE CAN MAKE
A COMPLETE RECOVERY,
LET'S HOPE HE DOES.

YET DONOVAN COULD NOT BE SURE. WERE THE SIGNS OF STRAIN DEEPENING ON THE COLONEL'S FACE WHEN HE RETURNED ?



YOU'VE BEEN
MORTARING TOO FAR
BACK! DROP THE BOMBS
BEHIND THE ROCKS! GET
TWO MORTAR TEAMS
TOGETHER. I'LL LEAD
'EM IN MYSELF!

THEY LOADED THE MORTARS AND BOMBS INTO THE BACK OF A TRUCK. NEAMES WAS TALKING FAST, AS IF TO STOP HIMSELF THINKING...



LET ME GO WITH YOU, SIR. I'LL DRIVE -

NO, I'LL DRIVE MYSELF! NO USE RISKING MORE LIVES THAN NECESSARY. I'LL TAKE THESE GRENADES. THEY MAY COME IN USEFUL! MAYBE MULVANY'S SNUFF-BOX WILL ACT AS A LUCKY CHARM, EH?

THE C.O. GRIPPED THE WHEEL LIKE A VICE, HIS FOOT HARD DOWN ON THE ACCELERATOR.



IF WE CAN GET WITHIN FIVE HUNDRED YARDS, SIR, WE COULD GET THE TRAJECTORY.

ALL RIGHT, CORPORAL. FIVE HUNDRED YARDS IT IS!

AS THEY DROVE NEARER TO THE GERMAN POSITIONS, THE CONSTRICTION ON NEAMES' HEART TIGHTENED...



SUDDENLY THE BULLETS BEGAN TO COME AT THEM. ONE SMASHED INTO THE WINDSCREEN. OTHERS RICOCHETED OFF THE BONNET. NEAMES CHOKED BACK A CRY AS HE JAMMED ON THE BRAKE...



THE WHINE AND CRACK OF THE BULLETS WAS LIKE A DISCORDANT SYMPHONY DRUMMING INTO NEAMES' BRAIN. HE HAD TO GET OUT!

WE CAN
UNLOAD HERE,
SIR!

NO-NO!
WE'RE GOING
BACK! IT'S TOO
DANGEROUS!

HE BEGAN TO SWING THE TRUCK
ROUND - BUT ITS WHEELS SLID INTO
A DITCH AND IT LURCHED VIOLENTLY...

GOOD GRIEF!
WE'RE GOING
OVER!

NEAMES WAS THROWN CLEAR. HE SCRAMBLED TO HIS FEET AND BEGAN TO RUN, WILDLY - ANYWHERE, TO ESCAPE THE BULLETS ZIPPING ALL ABOUT HIM...



HE FINALLY SANK TO THE GROUND FROM SHEER LACK OF BREATH. AS HE LAY IN THE SNOW, THE ENORMITY OF HIS FAILURE SURGED OVER HIM...



HE HAD GONE FAR OFF THE ROAD. AHEAD OF HIM HE COULD SEE THE CLIFF-LIKE HILL. UP THERE IT WOULD BE SILENT-THERE WOULD BE NO BULLETS-NO SHELLS TO TORTURE HIS NERVES.



HE WAS SWEATING BY THE TIME HE REACHED THE FOOT OF THE HILL. A WEAKER-BODIED MAN COULD NOT HAVE GONE ON. BUT ADRIAN NEAMES DID NOT LACK BODILY STRENGTH.

IF ONLY THEY DON'T START FIRING AGAIN! NOT UNTIL I GET OUT OF RANGE!

THE HILLS OF ST. COBENZ HAD MADE DIFFICULT ROCK-CLIMBS FOR EXPERIENCED CLIMBERS IN PRE-WAR SUMMER DAYS. NOW, IN WINTER AND AT NIGHT, THE CLIMB WAS ALMOST SUICIDAL! TWICE HE FELL, SCRABBLED FOR A HANDHOLD AND RECOVERED...



POSSIBLY BECAUSE HE DID NOT CARE WHETHER HE LIVED OR DIED, HE FINALLY DRAGGED HIMSELF ON TO THE SUMMIT, HIS HANDS CUT AND BLEEDING. IT SEEMED VERY PEACEFUL UP THERE...

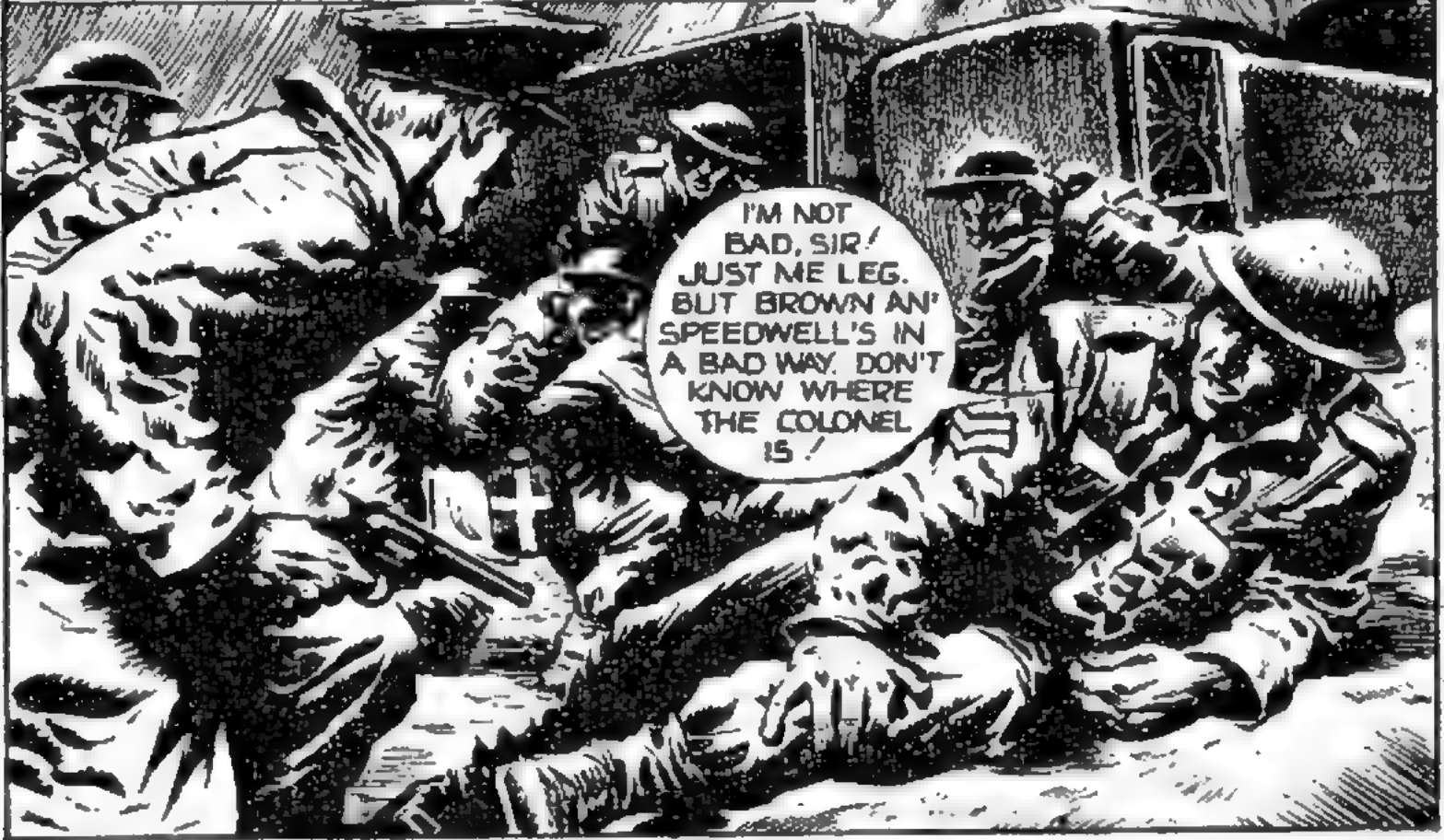


DOWN BELOW, CAPTAIN DONOVAN WAS LEADING A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO REACH THE INJURED MORTAR-CREWS IN THE WRECKED TRUCK.

START THE BRENS GOING! IT SHOULD MAKE 'EM KEEP THEIR HEADS DOWN. RIGHT-FOLLOW ME AT THE DOUBLE!



THE SCHMEISSERS' CHATTERING STOPPED AS THEY NEARED THE VEHICLE, ENABLING THEM TO GET IN ITS SHELTER...



DONOVAN DECIDED TO RISK A BREAK-BACK. HE HOISTED THE CORPORAL ON TO HIS BACK, WHILST THE OTHERS TOOK THE SERIOUSLY HURT MEN.

RIGHT! WHEN I SAY GO, GET MOVING AS FAST AS YOU CAN.

OKAY, SIR. WHENEVER YOU SAY!



THE GERMANS WERE TOYING WITH THEM. AS THE RANGERS LEFT THE SHELTER OF THE TRUCK, THE SHOTS BEGAN TO DIG INTO THE SNOW ALL ABOUT THEM.



AT THAT MOMENT, THE GERMAN OFFICER CHANCED TO LOOK UP...



THE BATTLE BELOW HAD SEEMED SO REMOTE TO ADRIAN NEAMES. HE FELT NO PANIC THERE ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP OUT OF THE LINE OF FIRE. HE WAS ABOUT TO TOSS A GRENADE DOWN WHEN THE GERMANS SWUNG THEIR GUNS UP AT HIM...



THE PAIN SEARED INTO HIM. YET HE FELT NO TERROR, NO NERVE-TINGLING FEAR. THE TIME FOR THAT WAS OVER...



SLOWLY, PAINFULLY, HE DRAGGED HIMSELF TO THE BRINK — AND THE MOMENT HE WAS SEEN FROM BELOW...



RED-HOT LEAD SLUGGED INTO HIS BODY. BUT HE WAS PAST FEELING, FAR PAST CARING. ONLY A MAN OF EXCEPTIONAL STRENGTH COULD HAVE HURLED THE GRENADE - AND AS IT WENT, HE TOPPLED OVER WITH IT...



THEY FOUND HIS BODY WITH THOSE OF THE GERMANS HE HAD OBLITERATED.

HE MUST HAVE CLIMBED THAT CLIFF - HEAVEN KNOWS HOW! AND I THOUGHT HE WAS YELLOW!

HIS NERVES WERE SHOT UP, THAT'S ALL. HE HAD WHAT IT TAKES ALL THE TIME!



ONCE THROUGH THE GAP, THE RANGERS MADE SHORT WORK OF THE REMAINING GERMAN RESISTANCE. SOON THE SUPPLY TRUCKS WERE ROLLING INTO ST. COBENZ.



DONOVAN LOOKED DOWN AT THE SILVER SNUFF-BOX HE HAD TAKEN FROM THE POCKET OF ADRIAN NEAMES. ONE OF THE BULLETS HAD GONE RIGHT THROUGH IT...

THE LENSTER RANGERS STILL OBSERVE 'FORT GEORGE DAY'. THERE IS ONLY ONE DIFFERENCE. THEY HAVE ADDED ANOTHER NAME TO THE TOAST...



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